



University awards framework

Education Committee

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Version history

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1.1	August 2017	Minor update	Approved by PVC (Education). Changes to sections 4.1.4 and 4.4.1 to reflect recommendations of the review of higher doctorates which reported to Education Committee in TT16. Addition of footnote reproducing text about credit included on transcripts issued by the University.
1.2	January 2022	Minor update	Approved by Quality Assurance Subcommittee Inclusion of new Integrated Masters (MBiol, MBiomedSci, MSci) and CertHE following approval of associated programmes by Education Committee. Updates to weblinks and minor formatting corrections.

1. Introduction

The University is an autonomous body empowered under United Kingdom (UK) law to award degrees. This autonomy means that the University is responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards and quality of its qualifications. It does this within the context of the history and traditions of the University, its Statutes and Regulations, and the national system of quality assurance of higher education in the UK.

This document describes the different qualifications that the University awards and explains how they relate to the national standards agreed for higher education qualifications.

2. The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications

The *Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) is published as part of [*The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*](#) (*Qualifications Frameworks*).

The *Qualifications Frameworks* are the principal national reference points for academic standards and are formal components of the UK Quality Code, *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards*, and in particular *Part A1: UK and European reference points for academic standards*. The *Qualifications Frameworks* describe the achievement represented by higher education qualifications in the form of qualification descriptors.

Qualification descriptors include a statement of outcomes, achievement of which is assessed and which a student should be able to demonstrate for the award of the qualification. This is the national threshold academic standard for the qualification. Qualification descriptors apply to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards granted by an institution with degree awarding powers. The main qualifications for each descriptor are expected to meet the descriptor in full, whereas other qualifications, involving lower volumes of learning, are expected to use the descriptor as a reference point and meet it in part.

The University awards framework (UAF) maps the awards of the University against the levels of the FHEQ. The UAF also maps awards against the [*Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*](#) (QF-EHEA) against which the FHEQ has been verified.

3. The use of credit at the University

The University does not assign credit values for the majority of its awards.¹ Some awards offered through the Department for Continuing Education and through the Foundation Oxford programme are credit-rated.

¹ Transcripts issued by the University include the following text on the back:

'Academic Credit

The University does not routinely apply credit weightings to its programmes and its courses are not generally taught on a modular basis. We take each year of full-time undergraduate study to equal 120 UK credits and 180 UK credits for Masters-level postgraduate study according to the Higher Education Credit Framework for England. In relation to the European Credit Transfer Scheme (ECTS), this is equivalent to 60 credits for undergraduate study and 90 credits for Masters-level postgraduate study.'

In line with other institutions in the UK that award credit, where credit is awarded one credit represents 10 notional hours of learning. This includes both formal contact hours and time spent on preparation or completion of assessments. Credit is awarded when the learning outcomes for a course, or in some cases part of a course, have been successfully achieved as demonstrated through completion of assessment to a threshold standard.

The minimum credit-ratings for awards which may carry credit are given in the main UAF table below; however, not all awards of that type will carry credits. The credit values of specific awards, when assigned, are recorded in the definitive record of the programme.

4. University awards framework (UAF)

The UAF is an overarching description of the qualifications and awards which the University offers. It positions those qualifications at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and takes into account the qualification characteristics which form part of the Quality Code.

Whilst the majority of awards of the University also reflect the titling conventions specified in the FHEQ, a small number of awards still retain their historic title.

Detailed regulations for particular qualifications are contained with the [Examination Regulations](#) for that award.

Qualification	Award abbreviations	FHEQ Level	Minimum credit value at level of award	QF-EHEA cycle
Doctorate	DPhil	8	N/A	3 rd cycle (end of cycle)
Professional Doctorate	DEng, DClinPsych, DM	8	N/A	
Master's by research	MLitt, MSc	7	N/A	2 nd cycle (end of cycle)
Master's by coursework	MSc, MSt, BPhil, MPhil, BCL, MJur, MBA, MPP, MTh, MFA	7	180 ²	
Integrated Master's	MBiochem, MBiol, MBiomedSci, MChem, MCompPhil, MCompSci, MEarthSci, MEng, MMath, MMathCompSci, MMathPhys, MPhys, MPhysPhil, MSci	7	N/A	

² Currently credit is only awarded for a small number of Master of Science (MSc) programmes; other Master's by coursework are not credit rated.

Qualification	Award abbreviations	FHEQ Level	Minimum credit value at level of award	QF-EHEA cycle
Bachelor's Degree (Medicine)	BM, BCh	7	N/A	
Postgraduate Diploma	PGDip	7	120 ³	
Postgraduate Certificate	PGCert	7	60 ⁴	
Postgraduate Certificate in Education	PGCE	7	N/A	
Bachelor's Degree with Honours	BA, BTh, BFA	6	N/A	1 st cycle (end of cycle)
Bachelor's Degree (Pass)	BA, BTh, BFA	6	N/A	
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education	PGCE	6	N/A	
Undergraduate Advanced Diploma	UGAdvDip	6	60	
Undergraduate Diploma	UGDip	5	120	
Undergraduate Certificate	UGCert	4	120	
Undergraduate Certificate of Higher Education	CertHE	4	120	
Foundation Certificate	FCert	4	N/A	

4.1. Doctoral awards

Doctoral awards are located at Level 8 of the FHEQ. All awards meet the full qualification descriptor for doctoral level awards.

4.1.1. Doctor of Philosophy (DPhil)

The degree of Doctor of Philosophy (known as a 'DPhil' at Oxford and a 'PhD' at other institutions) is an advanced research degree awarded following submission of a thesis and an oral examination.

³ Not all Postgraduate Diplomas are credit-rated.

⁴ Not all Postgraduate Certificates are credit-rated.

4.1.2. Doctor of Engineering (DEng)

The degree of Doctor of Engineering is an advanced research degree awarded following completion of a prescribed programme of coursework and submission of a thesis and an oral examination.

4.1.3. Doctor of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsych)

The degree of Doctor of Clinical Psychology is awarded after a period of clinical experience, academic coursework and a short dissertation.

4.1.4. Doctor of Medicine (DM)

The degree of Doctor of Medicine is awarded following submission of a thesis and an oral examination. In the rank of degrees⁵ of the University the Doctor of Medicine is ranked with the higher doctorates (see section 4.4.1. below); however as the award can be pursued through submission of a thesis overseen by a University appointed Adviser and is examined by an oral examination it is included in the UAF as a Level 8 award akin to the other professional doctorates. *[July 2017 note: the regulations for the DM are currently suspended, pending a review by the Medical Sciences Division⁶, as recommended by the review of higher doctorates which reported to Education Committee in TT16.]*

4.2. Graduate awards

Graduate awards are located at Level 7 of the FHEQ. All awards meet the full qualification descriptor for master's level awards, with the exception of Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas that may only partially meet the descriptor.

The University had historically offered the degrees of Bachelor of Science, Bachelor of Letters and Bachelor of Philosophy which were taken as graduate degrees after the award of Bachelor of Arts. These were replaced by the degrees of Master of Science (in 1971), Master of Letters and Master of Philosophy (in 1979). The degrees of Bachelor of Philosophy (section 4.2.2), Bachelor of Civil Law (section 4.2.3) and Bachelor of Music (section 4.4.2) retain their historic titles.

4.2.1. Master of Science by Research (MSc) and Master of Letters (MLitt)

The degrees of Master of Science by Research (offered in medicine, sciences and social sciences) and Master of Letters (offered in the humanities and social sciences) are research awards normally requiring six terms full-time study to complete. They may include a taught element but are awarded following submission of a substantial thesis and oral examination.

4.2.2. Bachelor of Philosophy (BPhil), Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Master of Theology (MTh)

The degrees of Master of Philosophy (offered in humanities and social sciences), Master of Theology (offered in theology only) and Bachelor of Philosophy (offered in philosophy only) combine taught coursework and an extended dissertation or research project. They normally

⁵ Part 2 of Council Regulations 22 of 2002 <https://governance.admin.ox.ac.uk/legislation/council-regulations-22-of-2002>

⁶ <https://gazette.web.ox.ac.uk/files/21july2016-no5141redactedpdf>

require a minimum of six terms full time study to complete (with the exception of the Master of Theology degree which requires a minimum of three terms full-time study).

4.2.3. Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) and Magister Juris (MJ)

The degrees of Bachelor of Civil Law and Magister Juris are taught awards offered in law which normally require three terms full-time study to complete. The Bachelor of Civil Law is normally taken by students with a common law background. The Magister Juris was introduced in 1991 as a parallel qualification for students without a common law background. The equivalent qualification within other universities is often titled the Master of Laws (LLM).

4.2.4. Master of Studies (MSt)

The degree of Master of Studies is a taught award and normally includes a short dissertation. It is mainly offered in the humanities and normally requires three terms full-time study to complete.

4.2.5. Master of Science (by coursework) (MSc)

The degree of Master of Science is a taught award and normally includes a short dissertation or research project. It is mainly offered in the sciences, social sciences and medicine and normally requires three terms full-time study to complete, but is often studied over a full calendar year.

4.2.6. Specialist Master's awards (MBA, MPP, and MFA)

The University offers a range of taught professional master's awards. The awards all involve completion of coursework and some also involve completion of a short dissertation. Their titles reflect the professional speciality forming the focus of the award.

4.2.7. Integrated Master's (MBiochem, MBiol, MBiomedSci, MChem, MCompPhil, MCompSci, MEarthSci, MEng, MMath, MMathCompSci, MMathPhys, MPhys, MPhysPhil, and MSci)

Integrated Masters' awards are delivered through a programme that combines study at the level of a bachelor's degree with honours with study at master's level and normally require twelve terms full-time study to complete.

4.2.8. Bachelor of Medicine (BM) and Bachelor of Surgery (BCh)

The degree of Bachelor of Medicine is awarded following completion of a course of study and supervised clinical practice. All recipients of the Bachelor of Medicine are also awarded the Bachelor of Surgery. In common with other UK institutions, and as provided for in the *Qualifications Frameworks*⁷, the award is made at Level 7 of the FHEQ but retains its historic 'Bachelor' title.

⁷ Paragraph 4.17.5 of *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*.

4.2.9. Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) and Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip)

Courses leading to the award of Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma normally involve a shorter period of study than a full master's degree and are normally completed entirely by coursework.

4.3. Undergraduate awards

Undergraduate awards are located at Levels 4, 5 and 6 of the FHEQ.

4.3.1. Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA), and Bachelor of Theology (BTh)

The majority of the University's undergraduate programmes of study result in the award of a Bachelor of Arts degree, including in the sciences. All awards meet the full qualification descriptor for Level 6 awards and normally take nine terms, or more, full-time study to complete.

4.3.2. Undergraduate Advanced Diploma (UGADip), Undergraduate Diploma (UGDip), Undergraduate Certificate (UGCert), and Foundation Certificate (FCert)

The Department for Continuing Education offers a range of courses leading to awards at levels 4, 5 and 6.

4.3.3. Undergraduate Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)

The award of an Undergraduate Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) is made following completion of the Foundation Oxford programme. It is a level 4 award and requires three terms of full-time study.

4.4. University awards not included in the UAF

The University awards a small number of degrees which sit outside the UAF as they do not result from undertaking either a taught course or piece of research under normal supervision arrangements.

4.4.1. Higher doctorates

The degrees of Doctor of Divinity (DD), Doctor of Civil Law (DCL), Doctor of Letters (DLitt), and Doctor of Science (DSc) may be awarded to candidates in recognition of an original contribution to the advancement of knowledge of such substance, distinction and global reach as to give the candidate an authoritative status of some branch or branches of learning, sustained over time and showing current and continued contribution to scholarship. They are awarded in recognition of published works rather than a piece of research conducted under supervision.

The degree of Doctor of Music (DMus) is similar in nature to the other higher doctorates but is awarded in recognition of a portfolio of musical composition.

See section 4.1.4 for information about the Doctor of Medicine (DM) degree.

4.4.2. Bachelor of Music (BMus)

The degree of Bachelor of Music may be awarded to certain holders of the Bachelor of Arts on submission of a short portfolio of musical composition.

4.4.3. Master of Surgery (MCh)

The degree of Master of Surgery may be awarded to candidates on submission of a thesis which makes an original contribution to knowledge deserving publication.

4.4.4. Master of Arts (MA)

In most UK universities, the Master of Arts is a degree awarded by examination. At the University of Oxford the Master of Arts degree is awarded by right to holders of certain undergraduate degrees. Graduates are eligible to apply for the award after a certain number of terms after matriculation, depending on their original award, as provided for in the *Examination Regulations*.

5. How the UAF is used

5.1. Course development and approval

As part of the approval process for new courses departments and faculties must ensure that the intended learning outcomes match with the relevant FHEQ qualification descriptor as designated in the UAF.

5.2. Course review

When divisions, departments and faculties undertake reviews of courses the UAF allows them to review whether their intended learning outcomes still match with the relevant FHEQ qualification descriptor designated in the UAF.

5.3. Connection with national expectations

The UAF is one of the University's mechanisms for connecting its own awards to the national expectations regarding higher education awards. It is a means of communicating the standards of its awards to students and the general public, and forms a piece of information considered as part of Higher Education Review (HER).

6. Resources

- *The Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies*
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-frameworks>
- *Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*
<http://www.ehea.info/page-qualification-frameworks>
- UK Quality Code
<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>